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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY QUOTA EXPOSES DIVISIONS AMONG
JORDANIAN WOMEN

REF: A. AMMAN 4423 B. AMMAN 1191

Classified By: CDA DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) One of the unforeseen aspects of the new women's quota in Parliament is that it has exposed cultural cleavages and the differing agendas between women who live in urban areas and women who live in tribal-based areas. Neither group believes the other represents their collective interests.
End Summary.

AMMAN WOMEN CLAIM UNDERREPRESENTATION...

2. (C) The formula used for the women's quota has come under some criticism since elections--especially from Amman-based women who failed to win a seat under the quota. Laila Naffa, a women's rights activist, told the Jordan Times that "the government was not serious enough when introducing the quota because the distribution was unfair." The quota did yield overrepresentation for areas such as Tafileh, which at a little over 85,000 people is the smallest urban area in Jordan, but which garnered two of six of the women's seats. One successful Tafileh female candidate won only 300 votes in her district, but the district was small enough for her to have a winning percentage nationwide.

3. (C) Politically active women in Amman, typically more progressive than women in tribal areas, have found it difficult to relate to the newly-elected women Parliamentarians. Some ask how women from traditional, conservative areas are supposed to represent them. One woman candidate from Amman had rejected running in her tribal area; she told Poloff she ran in Amman so her parliamentary career could focus on "real issues" and not just on performing "wasta" functions.

4. (C) The perceived division goes both ways. At a luncheon for the newly-elected women Parliamentarians, one Tafileh winner bitterly complained to the heads of two women-focused NGOs that she had never received any support from them. She told Poloff that she was glad no women from Amman won: "they are already over-represented." She also added, "women in Amman spend more time on their hair and make-up than anything else."

...BUT ALSO HAVE THEMSELVES TO BLAME

5. (C) While the implementation of the quota may have favored women running in smaller, more rural districts, many political observers have noted the lack of a coherent political strategy and coordination between women candidates running in Amman (many of whom competed in the same districts, splitting the votes). Also, criticism has been levied that campaigns in Amman were launched too late to be effective. When Poloff asked Salwa Nasser, the NGO coordinator for the Jordanian National Commission for Women, why women candidates in Amman were unsuccessful, she claimed that women had underestimated the influence of the tribes in the election.

COMMENT

6. (C) Although the quota was designed to further the women's cause in Jordan, so far, it has placed women in urban and rural areas at odds. Each set of women--urban "liberal" and rural "tribal"--believe the other group will not represent their interest. The suspicion and resentment each side has shown for the other may ultimately handicap the efforts of women here to build a constituency based on "women's interests" unless the two sides can begin to identify some common political ground. Some women candidates, inexperienced in politics, appear also to have misjudged the predominant influence of tribal factors in these elections.

